

engagement and the wedding. During this interval the young man should understand that the fact of his engagement does not give him the right to the freedom of his fiancée's home: and the girl should understand that her lover is not her slave, nor is he to be expected to spend every spare hour in her company.

Both should see a reasonable amount of each other and have time to discuss quietly together their plans for the future, and occupy themselves in their different ways with the necessary work which is required for entering on their new life and home. It has been well said that during this time "understandings should be well settled, and confidences thoroughly established; and, as a rule, not more than a year should intervene between the engagement and marriage. Protracted engagements are apt to be both physically and mentally unhealthful."

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(7) CASES IN WHICH MARRIAGE IS
UNDESIRABLE OR WRONG

We have already spoken of the great difficulties which must follow when husband and wife belong to different religious bodies or are of strongly divergent religious opinions. Marriages between such can seldom be happy. Husband and wife cannot ever be really one in heart and soul unless they are united in their spiritual life and in true fellowship with God.

But differences of religious convictions are not the only obstacles to a right and happy marriage. There are degrees of kinship within which marriage is prohibited, and though in one instance—that of marriage with a deceased wife's sister—the State has now legalized such marriages, it must be remembered that the Church has not altered her law in this matter, and that she still refuses to give her blessing to such unions. Marriages between first cousins, though not absolutely forbidden by the Church, have always been—as indeed they ought to be—discouraged on account of the nearness of kinship; and also from the fact that in a very large number of

cases the children of such marriages are either very weakly, or mentally deficient, or born with some physical defect.

Again, it is surely both selfish and wrong for either a man or a woman to marry, who is conscious of some inherited wrong tendency, such as a predisposition to insanity, or who is suffering from some physical disease, such as consumption. Both the man and the woman owe it to each other, and also to the children who may be born of them, that they are each not only pure in heart, but also healthy in mind and body. It may appear in many cases hard to be restricted from what may seem the one thing needed to make life happy; but surely to any right-minded man or woman the hardship of abstaining from marriage is a light thing compared to the misery of feeling that they have handed on a heritage of moral or physical misery to their offspring, or have brought sickness and unhappiness to the partner of their life.

If, unfortunately, an engagement has taken place between a man and a woman, and one of them is conscious of some hindrance such as we have mentioned, it is their bounden duty to tell the other quite frankly of it, and to be prepared to break off the engagement if it should seem right to do so. Where

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there is no such hindrance, and the engagement is in other respects right and happy, then both can look forward with thankfulness and joy to their wedding-day.

II

MARRIAGE

(I) THE NEW HOME

THERE are perhaps few things in the later days of courtship more interesting than the preparation of the new home. There is the house to be chosen and furnished, and sometimes the situation to be selected. Probably in most cases this will be more or less decided by the husband's work and occupation. But even then there is often some room for choice; and when this is so, surely one great element in the choice of where to live should be nearness to a church where there are full opportunities for all spiritual needs. It is extraordinary how seldom this consideration is taken into account. People think much of scenery, social conditions, nearness to their business, convenience as to trams, trains and shops, but often leave the question of nearness to a church, and of the kind of church, out of account. And yet since religion is the source, and only source, of the real happiness of a

home, the question of nearness to a church, and of the sort of services which may be had there, is surely of the first importance. How often in the trials and anxieties of life may not both husband and wife find their strength and guidance, their peace and courage in their Church, which has become to them a spiritual home!

The new home having been chosen, there is next all the interest of furnishing and preparing it. Happy are those who are content to begin their married life very simply, beginning with a house and household and a standard of living well within their means, and thus from the very first being able to put by something for a rainy day, and escaping that most miserable of all miseries, living right up to or even beyond one's income. Simplicity in furniture and in one's way of living is compatible with the truest happiness; and when money is not wasted on display, there is always something with which to buy books and pictures, and gradually to add to the treasures and beauty of the home.

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(2) THE WEDDING

Those who are wise will resolutely set their faces against a large and showy wedding. A great crowd of people and much display are surely not the best accompaniments to one of the most solemn and holy days in a man and woman's life. The result is not happiness, but much expense, much worry, and much fatigue.

The Prayer Book tells us that it is "expedient"—that is, right and suitable—that the newly-married couple should receive the Holy Communion at the time of their marriage. And surely there can be no more happy or blessed beginning to married life than for husband and wife to kneel together on their wedding day to receive the "Bread of Life." For this reason it is best, where it is possible, that the wedding should be early in the morning, so that the Marriage Service may take place, as the Prayer Book intends it should, at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. If this is not possible, and the wedding takes place in the afternoon, the bride and bridegroom should make their

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Communion at an early celebration on the same day.

Let the guests be the relations and real friends of those who are to be married; and let them remember that they are invited, not merely to a social entertainment, but to take their part in a solemn service, and to ask GOD'S blessing on the newly-married couple with real and earnest prayer.

Those who are to be married ought to read over very carefully the words of the Marriage Service, and to consider seriously the meaning of the solemn promises which each is about to make, and what is involved in them. For this purpose they might read a small book, published by S.P.C.K., called *A Devotional Explanation of the Marriage Service*.¹ A careful study of the service will show the great sacredness with which the Church regards marriage, and the wonderful and rich blessings which she bestows on those who are married with her blessing.

¹ By Rev. G. Longridge: S.P.C.K., Northumberland Avenue, Charing Cross, price 1d., postage $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

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(3) THE INDISSOLUBILITY OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

“Those whom GOD hath joined together let no man put asunder,” are the solemn words with which the Church announces the union of the man and the woman in Holy Matrimony. No words in the whole service need in these days to be more carefully considered. The Divorce Act of 1857 has on this point brought the law of the State into direct conflict with that of the Church, but the Church has never relaxed her law. It is sometimes supposed that the Church allows divorce in certain cases. This is not the fact, if by divorce is meant the liberty of the man or the woman during the life of either to marry again. The only kind of separation which the Church allows is that which the Civil Law now calls a “judicial separation,” which gives no liberty of re-marriage. It is true that in some cases the Church has sanctioned re-marriage; this has, however, not been on the ground that a marriage once made could be dissolved, but on the ground that the marriage was void from the

first, i.e., that through some cause it was never a marriage at all.

On this point the Church in her Prayer Book is absolutely plain and uncompromising. She takes her stand on the words of our LORD Himself, "What GOD hath joined together, let not man put asunder." (*S. Matt.* xix. 6; *S. Mark* x. 9.) And in the prayer at the end of the service she says that GOD, "knitting them together, did teach that it should never be lawful to put asunder those whom by matrimony He had made one." In this sense, and in this sense only, do the man and the woman make their promise "to keep only unto each other as long as they both shall live," and to be faithful to each other "till death us do part." No words can be more plain, no promise can be more binding. In view of the sad disregard on the part of so many people of this most solemn promise, and of the reckless way in which, in so many classes of society, the sanctity of marriage is being violated, all who desire GOD'S blessing on our nation, and the preservation of home life, will do well to weigh most earnestly and to do their best to bring to the notice of all who are married or are about to marry, two very solemn declarations put forth at two successive meetings of the Lambeth Conference. In 1897 the one hundred and ninety-four

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